



Words you might be unsure about

You will hear <#> parts of the democratic system. Some of these might be unfamiliar to you. Or you might

departments (such as the Department of Health and Social Care) normally hold the position of Secretary of State. Each of them is supported by a small team of junior ministers.

Ministers for the United Kingdom are chosen by the Prime Minister and come from either the House of Commons or the House of Lords (see below).

Cabinet The Cabinet is the team of the most senior ministers in the government.

Civil Service The Civil Service is the group of administrators who help the government develop and implement its policies. Members of the Civil Service are called civil servants. They are neutral and do not take sides in political debates.

Legislature A legislature is a body with the authority to make or change laws. It also holds debates and scrutinises the work of the executive.

Parliament The Westminster Parliament is the legislature of the United Kingdom as a whole. It is based in London and has two chambers: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Members of either chamber

House of Commons The House of Commons is the main, or first, chamber of the Westminster Parliament. The government of the day needs the support of the House of Commons to stay in power. The House of Commons has 650 elected Members of Parliament (MPs), each representing a constituency. Most MPs are members of a political party.

House of Lords The House of Lords is the second chamber of the Westminster Parliament. It is made up of around 800 unelected peers. Its powers are somewhat weaker than those of the House of Commons. Its members rarely try to block something that the majority in the elected House of Commons want.

Members of Parliament Members of Parliament, or MPs, are elected representatives who represent their constituency in the House of Commons. They are normally elected in general elections (see below).

Peers Members of the House of Lords are called peers. While peers are not elected, there are three ways in which someone can become a peer. Most (currently almost 700) are appointed for life, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. Some (up to 92) have an inherited title. A smaller number (up to 26) are bishops in the Church of England.

Whips Whips are either MPs or peers who work on behalf of their political party in parliament. Their role is to manage the relationship between their party leadership and its MPs and/or peers, and to encourage the latter two groups to support government policies.

Select Committee A select committee is a group of MPs or peers from different parties who scrutinise a specific area of government policy. For example, the Foreign Affairs Select

committees can call experts and ministers to give advice, ask the government for information, and make recommendations.

Devolved administrations Decision-making on many matters is devolved to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. That means that decisions about, say, the health service or schools in Scotland are made in Scotland.

Scotland has the Scottish Parliament and Scottish government. Wales has the Welsh Parliament, or Senedd, and the Welsh government. Northern Ireland has the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive.

In England, such matters are decided by the UK Parliament and government.

Local government Local government is made up of councils with responsibility for providing a range of services in local areas. It takes different forms in different parts of the country, and some places also have regional mayors. Local government is largely run by elected councillors.

Political party A political party is a group of people who share a common ideology or set of political goals. Political parties compete between each other to win votes and seats in elections, in order to advance their political aims.

Judiciary The judiciary is often called the third branch of the state, along with the executive and

Direct democracy

Majority government – A majority government is a government that holds more than half of the seats in the House of Commons. In the UK system, a single political party is often able to form a majority government, but this is not always the case.

Opposition –